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24 November 1975

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The Possibility of Turkish Acquisition of  
Soviet Arms

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2. The US arms embargo of February-October 1975 severely reduced the effectiveness of the Turkish armed forces, particularly the air force, because they were almost entirely equipped with US weapons systems. As a result, even many normally pro-US Turkish officers were persuaded that their forces must never again be so heavily dependent on US armaments. Consequently, while continuing to seek more reliable access to the US as a source of military equipment, the Turks have stepped up their efforts both to locate alternate foreign sources and to improve their indigenous production capability. Most

NSA review completed

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[Redacted]

of this effort has been directed towards closer ties with West Europe and with other Moslem states, but some expression of interest in Soviet equipment is understandable, if only to make the West more amenable to Turkish requests, e.g. during the Defense Cooperation Agreement negotiations with the U.S. The Soviets, eager to take advantage of US-Turkish difficulties, probably would offer such equipment on terms more attractive than those normally offered by Western European sources.

3. There is no evidence that any serious negotiations between Turkey and the Soviet Union for the purchase of arms have yet taken place, although some exploratory discussions undoubtedly preceded the Turkish decision to send a General Staff representative to Moscow. The Turks apparently have expressed a specific interest in a Soviet offer to provide helicopters, but it is not clear whether these would be for military or civilian use.

[Redacted]

4. Although the USSR obviously has the capability to participate in the major re-equipment of the Turkish forces, Turkey probably would turn to it only as a last resort and would certainly see no value in moving from heavy dependence on the US to heavy dependence on the USSR. The acquisition of some equipment such as helicopters seems possible, however, particularly if the financial terms offered by the Soviets were favorable. Such a purchase could appear particularly appealing to Demirel as a way of countering criticism from Ecevit and the Republican People's Party that he has been too closely tied to the US. Defenders of such a purchase might also point out that a precedent for the acquisition of Soviet arms was set by Kemal Ataturk himself during the early days of the Turkish republic.